Chapter III
Socio - Cultural Dialectics of Dalit and African American Autobiography
A dialectical theory of a literature primarily underlines the inexorable socio–historical prediction of literature. Being a product of social experience, literature is in turn an active producer of meanings, values and aesthetic effects which have great implications for the historical development of society.

As a refraction of social experience through the prism of human imagination, the ontological essence of literature is to be located in terms of the extent to which it recycles social experience and transforms it into an aesthetic proportion.

The values, criteria and standards by which literature is measured are in themselves matrixes in the system of values of a given society. But society manifests itself in terms of definite classes, groups and formation in the process of the production and reproduction of the means and ends for the sustenance of life. We can approach a dialectical understanding of a given body of literature first through an identification of specific categories which encapsulates the ramified interrelationships between works in that literature and their determinants.

In the case of Dalit and African American literature it is the responsibility of dialectical theory of literature to insist on the rootedness of literary art, as a contributive social practice in the very processes and social experiences which constitute American and Indian history and from which we can correctly characterize the American and Indian reality.

Dalits in India are the victims of social injustices and the *Varṇa* system and Karma theory. They were marginalized, exploited, oppressed and maltreated and forced to live in the darkness of slavery by the Hindus on the basis of caste. To them, Hindus were their masters and their word was the last word to them. Dalits were forced to live in ignorant conditions.
The same condition was faced by the African Americans in America. They too were the victims of slavery. African Americans were brought to America as untrained workers and made slaves. They were given inhuman treatment by the whites. African Americans were denied facilities like education and living with families and right to own property. They were kept ignorant and separated from their families because White Americans wanted to prevent a black rebellion which would put an end to their being “masters”.

African Americans in America and Dalits in India have been socially, culturally, economically and politically exploited, maltreated and suppressed from more than centuries. It is difficult to imagine the suffering and sorrows of the Dalits and African Americans in contemporary India and America. This chapter deals with the social, cultural and economical exploitation of Dalits and African Americans.

The Dalit and African American Autobiographies have their own literary customs and traditions. Dalit autobiographers were oppressed because of caste and the Karma philosophy of Hindus in traditional India. On the other hand African American autobiographers were oppressed because of their colour and race. All the autobiographers had to face marginalization and deprivation. They realized this deprivation and struggled against it. Dalits were marginalized by the high caste Hindus and to some extent because of their own traditions and customs. “When you walk in the darkness for a long time, your steps get used to even that” was the case with Dalits and African Americans. Dalits and African Americans are the victims of the social injustices and gradually they started believing that they were born to suffer. They were exploited, suppressed and oppressed to such an extent that they did not venture out of their miserable
conditions nor did they inspire others to break the bondages. They were pushing their children in the darkness of illiteracy under the burden of customs and traditions.

For example, Laxman Mane was admitted to school, but his own community members stood against him and forced him to leave school as going to school was not their right. The same happened with Laxman Gaikwad. When Laxman Gaikwad started attending school some of his neighbouring children suffered from loose motions. Their parents went to Laxman’s house and told his father that it was because of Laxman’s going to school. The school master then explained that the children were suffering from loose motions because of unclean water and thus the issue of Laxman’s schooling was subsided. Kishore too, was a victim of the customs and traditions of Kolhati community. African Americans were exploited by the White Americans and by their own community and family members. Douglass says “African Americans are like crabs in the basket. By pulling each others legs no one letting to go ahead”. African Americans lived in their own world. They never thought of escaping from the bondages. The exploitation of slaves by whites was the social exploitation and their enslaved minds depict cultural slavery. Thus, they became victims of society and culture. Because of Black Panther movement and Negro Association they realised that they were living in a miserable conditions. They had lost their identity. Richard Wright’s Granny and Aunt Addie proved hurdles in Richard’s way because his Granny was religious but and did not allow Richard to read novels and stories as it was devil’s work. She always asked Richard to attend the church in which Richard was not interested at all. Dalits and African Americans were ardent follower of customs and traditions. They were not ready to excuse anything for the
sake of their traditions and customs. Evaluation of these autobiographies highlights the socio-cultural exploitation of both the Dalits and African Americans.

Laxman Mane belongs to the Kaikadi community which is a nomadic tribe. Laxman Mane has literally presented in front of us the whole picture of traditions and customs of Kaikadi community through his autobiography – *An Outsider*.

Kaikadis have faith in god and believe that god protects them from ghosts, phantoms and evil spirits. Laxman Mane describes the religious nature of Kaikadis:

These poor nomadic tribals come to seek the blessings of the mother goddess. She protects them. Neither ghosts, nor phantoms nor any other supernatural elements would harm them. While moving from village to village, they stay at the burial or cremation grounds or in the places where villagers relieve themselves. Often they have to cross mountains and plains and to go from village to village to earn their livelihood. They take their gods along in the baskets. However they visit the mother goddess once a year. If not they believe that their next generation will be destroyed. 1.

Kaikadis have their own customs and laws. Their disputes were solved in their community Panchayat. The Panchayat’s word was final word to them. If anyone broke any customs he would be excommunicated from the community and when the Panchayat was held the dispute would be take up. By paying a fine the excommunicated person could regain his place in the community. Laxman and his family members were excommunicated from the community because Laxman married a girl who belonged to the high caste and it is not permitted in a Kaikadi community to marry of person who is not a Kaikadi. Laxman regained his place in the society after
remarrying Shashi as per the Kaikadi customs and traditions and by paying fine.

Women are treated very inhumanly by the Kaikadi community. They are neither allowed to bath nor are allowed to comb hair. Laxman narrates:

Martimama noticed that his wife was combing her hair. He rushed to her furiously and dropped her to the ground and sat on her chest and hit her face on the mirror. He was shouting “I’ll cut you into pieces. Don’t you dare be smart with me! And things like that. He would never allowed her bathe or comb her hair.2.

A Kaikadi woman has to return home before sunset, otherwise her husband does not allow her to enter house and in such a helpless condition she has to return to her parents. Nobody in the village has the right to shelter her. Then her father would present her before the Pancahyat, and she has to obey the Panchayat’s verdict. After that she would be allowed to live with her husband again. Women of the Kaikadi community were living in the bondage of customs and traditions. They were exploited by their own traditions and also by the high caste Hindus. The oppression of the Kaikadi women depicts the sad truth about how human beings can be unhuman and beastly, to their fellow beings. The Kaikadis are dominated by the society but Kaikadi women are dominated by custom, society, tradition and culture.

Similarly, African American women too were victims of various external factors and this in turn made them slaves of their own thinking.

Kaikadi’s don’t have permanent jobs therefore they do seasonable jobs and even when they were unable to get any work they resort to thieving in groups. Laxman describes:
The Kaikadi women went to sell their wares in the villages on a market day, in groups of three or four. Pretending to have a lot of money, they would bargain. Then they would begin receiving a certain quantity of grain simultaneously in their respective bags. When the shopkeeper busied himself counting the measures one of the women would leave the shop with one of the bags. Then suddenly, one of the remaining women would ask the shopkeeper how many measures he had put in her bag to start a row. Other women would join her in raising a racket. And then pretending annoyance she would refuse to buy any grain, empty her bag and leave the shop. This was a very skillful way of stealing.

Kaikadis were not thieves but their hunger forced them to steal. Laxman Mane, through *An Outsider* brought out the customs and traditions of the nomadic tribe – Kaikadi, and thus underscores their social and cultural sufferings.

Laxman Gaikwad through his autobiography *Uchalya - The Branded* pictured the customs and traditions of nomadic tribe. The people of their tribe were branded as thieves by the law. Laxman Gaikwad started his autobiography by stating that he has no native place and no record of birth date. He lived in a hut that was nothing more than a low, hay thatched roof. All of them had to crawl on their hands and knees to get into or out of the hut.

Uchalays accepted thieving as business. They were branded as thieves and no one offered them jobs. They migrated from one place to another in search of their livelihood. They were banished by the upper strata of the society. For many days they could not engage in jobs so that they had to sleep without food. Generation after generation they were forced into thieving. As explained by Laxman, his grandfather was a notorious and unpopular thief because whenever there would be a theft in
the village; the police would go in search of his grandfather. They forced his grandfather to shake hands with them and become their informer. Laxman’s grandmother too used to go to nearby towns for committing theft. The youngest children also began stealing and thus it became the tradition of Uchalyas. People from this community trained their children in their early childhood to commit theft. Laxman recalls:

In our community young apprentices (boys and girls) start their training with lessons in being beaten. They are trained to withstand physical beatings and all sorts of torture so that they will not disclose the names of their colleagues when he caught and tortured by the police for information.4.

The Dalits were forced by law, society and culture to steal and become thieves. This led to their anguish and frustration which has been highlighted by the autobiographers.

_Uchalya_ community has its own marriage customs and traditions. They are not allowed to marry out of their caste and they are not allowed to see and meet their partner before marriage. The opinion of the boy whose marriage is to be fixed is not considered as it is decided by the elders. Laxman’s marriage was arranged by his brother. Laxman wanted to see his wife so he went to meet her but when his family members came to know about his meeting, they cursed him. Laxman recalls:

When I returned to Latur all my brothers began to abuse me ‘You harlot’s pimp, you went to see your wife before marriage! We’re also married. You should have seen her without their knowledge at least.5.

Marriage is a personal matter for most of the communities but it is a public affair in the Uchalya community. The youngsters are governed by the laws and norms of their community and thus enslaved by their very own society and culture.
Uchalya community allows polygame, which is again a custom not followed by the progressive society. The culture of the community dominates and suppressed women by allowing men the liberty of marrying more than one woman. Permitting a man to several marital relations is injustice against the women of that community. Laxman hints at the pitiable condition of Uchalya women. He states:

In our community it is permissible for a husband to sever marital relations with the wife at any time. So also a husband is permitted to contract a second marriage. If a husband or a wife is unwilling to continue marital relationship with his or her spouse he or she is required to reimburse the marriage expenses in the panchyat settlement.6.

Consuming liquor is a part of the tradition of the Uchalya community. They drink liquor on festive days, fairs and also during marriage ceremonies. It becomes a prestige issue for them to drink liquor. In other communities after marriages are arranged people very carefully inquire if the boy who is being sought as a match for their daughter is addicted to drinking and other vices. But to the contrary, Laxman was forced to drink. Laxman describes:

In other communities people very carefully enquire if the boy, who is being sought after as match to their daughter, is addicted to drinking and such other bad habits. At the in-law’s place, however, I was forced to drink. I vomited as I could not stomach the alcohol.7

Consuming liquor, which is otherwise a vice and stigma on a person’s character, becomes a manly quality in that community. By forcing the groom to consume liquor they make him suited to the culture of their community.
Marriages are arranged on the amount of dowry in Uchalaya community. One who pays the highest amount for his daughter in the form of dowry was accepted by the groom. The same happened with Laxman. His elder brother Manik dada arranged his marriage with Kavata girl. But his aunt from Jawali wanted to get her daughter married to Laxman. She promised him 50 gms of gold and a house in Latur. Laxman refused her proposal. To convince Laxman to marry her daughter she gave liquor to Manik dada and forced Laxman to marry her daughter. But Laxman was firm on his decision to marry a Kavatha girl.

Very low treatment is given to women in the Uchalaya community. People from the community always beat their wives for trivial reasons and sometimes for no reason at all. Laxman Gaikwad severally beat his wife suspecting misconduct to him. His sisters always told evil things about her to Laxman. Laxman describes-

This resulted in quarrels and misunderstanding between my wife and me. I became touchy and suspected my wife without any rhyme of reason just because she stood outside the room while I started beating her mercilessly. My sister in law add fuel to the fire by telling me that Chhabu was not a woman of good character, we should not accepted her in the marriage. That fan my anger and rouse me all more against chhabu.8.

These lines highlight the plight of women of Uchalaya community. Women are treated like animals and suspected like criminals. They have no exposure to the world, education and even dignity within the community. They become victims of the society in general and culture in particular.
Laxman Gaikwad has described all traditions and customs of Uchalya community. His autobiography is an authentic document to study the customs and traditions of the Uchalya community.

Kishore Kale through his autobiography *Kolhatyache Por – Against All Odds* displayed the customs and traditions of Kolhati community – a nomadic tribe.

The Kolhati’s have developed a distinct style of dance and song called lavani. The music has more rhythm than melody and the songs are loud and loaded with suggestive words and phrases. The dance itself is designed to attract male attention and it is called ‘tamasha’.

Kolhati women under the guise of Chira Utarna are sold to a person who pays the highest amount for her virginity. Kishore Kale recalls the tradition of a Kolhati community:

The Kolhati community forces its women to dance to attract male attention. Young, teenage virgins are given to men in a ceremony called ‘chira utarna’ with all the trapping of a wedding but none of its sanctity. The man pays a prefixed price for her virginity. As long as he visits her, she does not dance on stage and does not see any other man. But if she is abandoned by the man she has to go back to the stage and earn money which is appropriated by her father and brothers.

Shanta was given to Namdeorao Jagtap with all the ceremony of the chira utarna - the Kolhati ritual of selling a virgin girl. The first man in a Kolhati girl’s life had to pay her family a certain amount of money or agree to pay it over a fixed period of time. The money may be paid in cash or gold or land. For Kolhatis, dancing as a profession is their tradition. This tradition of dancing has been passed on from one generation to the other since ages. Kishore’s mother Shantabai wanted to became a teacher. She
completed her middle education and after that her family admitted her to dance classes. Kishore narrates the dancing tradition:

Most Kolhati girls are sent off to learn dancing when they are nine or ten years old because their young bodies are flexible and can be easily trained. Many of these girls never go to school. But Shanta had spent 7 long years in school dreaming of becoming a school teacher. She was a teenager when she was forced to learn dancing and her body never acquired the flexibility and grace that women who started young had.

The Kolhatis enforce certain things on their women and make them victims of their own community as well as of the dominant society. The Kolhati’s literally sell their sisters and daughters to the highest bidder. The sale, too, does not ensure a safe and secure life for them, instead, it creates insecurity because, the man has right to abandon the woman, who then, has to go back to Tamasha and wait for other customers. This is the socio-cultural predicament of Kolhati women.

Kolhati women always hope to marry and settle with somebody and give up dancing. But some women love dancing as an art and dance till they became old.

The men who kept Kolhati women as mistresseess were usually rich, and their family members did not like either money being spent on these women or the risk of there being any claimant to the property when he died. Often the man himself would get rid of her by killing her or even selling her off to another man.

Life of a Kolhati woman is full of sufferings and sorrows. They suffered within the family and also in their society.

Kale’s mother- Shantabai was harassed by her father, Kondiba. Shantabai wanted to complete her school education and become a teacher.
but her father sent her to dance and music classes and forced her to dance in Tamasha. When Shanta was a teenager her Chira Utrana ceremony was arranged by her family with Namdeorao Jagtap. When she became pregnant she was abandoned by Jagtap, Shanta gave birth to Kishore- who was called as an illegitimate child and always harassed in the school and in the society. Shanta again joined tamasha for supporting her family. She went with Krushnarao Wadker to Parbhani as his wife. After marriage also her sufferings did not end. Wadkar was a moneylender in Parbhani but he had bad habits of going to tamasha and gambling. He lost his all wealth in gambling and in tamasha and as a result he always beat Shantabai. Kishore’s aunt’s Jiji, Baby and Susheela suffered the same plight. Jiji was treated very badly by her father Kondiba. Jiji owned 25 acres land but her father always took away all the earnings from the farm without giving a single rupee to her. Jiji was paralyzed and was left by her family members alone in the farm house to die. When Kishore came to take her to hospital Kondiba refused and told him to give money then only he would allow him to take her to the hospital. For Kolhati’s, women are only for earning money and once they stopped earning they are thrown into the storehouse. Kishore understood this suffering of women in Kolhati community because he was now a learned man. Several questions were raised in his mind after observing the sufferings of the women:

Has a woman no right to her own life? Is the only aim of our lives to provide a livelihood for our fathers and brothers? It is sin to be born a beautiful woman in a Kolhati family?.

There are only tears in the life of a tamasha dancer. They are exploited by their family members and the society. They are exploited by their fathers and brothers. They have to dance and attract the high class men which
enable them to earn livelihood. Tamasha dancers are harassed by the high classmen. These men made them dream about a luxurious life but after fulfilling their physical desire they abandoned them. Kishore narrates:

Susheela maushi had waited for two years for Ramesh Kaka, but he did not return. Ramesh Patil had been part of Susheela Maushi’s life for almost ten long years and suddenly one day he had walked out of her life without a word. Susheela maushi was now 33 years old she had one son, Anil from Ramesh Patil and two children Balaji, And Jaya from Sopanrao Golegaonker of Selu. Susheela maushi did not know how to educate her kids or find money to run her fathers household. Baby maushi, too was in a similar situation. She had waited for Pawar Saheb for two years. He had made her give up dancing and used to visit her at Nerla, but soon as she had a son, he abandoned her. It was the second time this had happened to Baby maushi and she was in a state of shock, crying all day.

Women from the Kolhati community suffered a lot because of the customs and traditions of their community. They are exploited and oppressed by their own community members and by the whole society as well.

Like Dalit Autobiographers, African American autobiographers have their own customs and traditions and are dominated by society and culture. Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington and Richard Wright have described their customs and traditions in their autobiographies. Thus, autobiographies have become a very important tool to understand the social and cultural conditions of American society.

For Douglass and Washington, slavery was their tradition. They were forced by their masters to follow the rules and regulations of slavery. As compared to Washington, Douglass suffered a lot because of slavery. He rendered his childhood and youth in slavery. Douglass, in his autobiography My Bondage My Freedom has described the nature of
slavery. Slaves were not allowed to have record of their birth and deaths and they were treated beyond the animals. Very low allowances were given to them and low quality food especially, ash cake and stale pieces of meat were served to them. They were not able to know their ages because their mothers remembered the birth dates of their children by the harvest timing and that they predicted their ages accordingly.

They were not allowed to ask their masters their birth dates because such questions deemed evidence of impatience and even of impudent curiosity.

Douglass narrates the nature of slavery:

The condition of slave is simply that of the brute beast. He is a piece of property – a marketable commodity, in the language of the law, to be bought or sold at the will and caprice of the master who claims him to be his property. His own good, his conscience, his intellect, his affections, are all set aside by the master.13.

Slaves were denied many pleasures and regular activities of normal life. The institution of marriage did not exist for the the slaves. They were deprived of various human rights too. Douglass states:

The marriage institution cannot exist among slaves, and one sixth of the population of democratic America is denied its privilege by the law of land. What is to be thought of a nation boasting of its liberty, boasting of its humanity, boasting of its Christianity, boasting of its love of justice and purity. And yet having within its open borders three millions of persons denied by law the right of marriage.14.

Slavery is the darkest past of the African Americans which will never be forgotten by them. Men and women slaves received eight pounds of pickled pork, or its equivalent in fish as their monthly allowance. The pork was often tainted and the fish was of the poorest quality. The herrings would bring very little if offered for sale in any northern market. This was
the allowance for entire month for a full grown slave working constantly in the open field from morning until night, everyday of the month except Sunday and living on a fraction more than a quarter of a pound of meat per day, and less than a pack of cornmeal per week. The yearly allowance of clothing for the slaves on plantation consisted of two linen shirts— such linen as the coarsest crash towels were made of one pair of trousers and a jacket of woolen, most slazily put together for winter one pair of yarn stockings, and one pair of shoes of the coarsest description. The entire slave apparel could not have cost more than 8 dollars per year. Slavery became a custom and tradition for Douglass and he followed all the rules of slavery and bought his slavery from his master and lived as a freeman.

Booker T. Washington was born a slave. He at the start of his autobiography describes the cruel nature of slavery. Booker was denied to education. He had to work in the coal mine and salt furnace.

Booker’s mother, sister and brother lived in a log cabin of about 14 by 16 feet square. Booker did not know about the history of his mother as slaveholders did not put the records of birth and death of slaves. Booker describes:

In the days of slavery not very much attention was given to family history and family records that is black family records.15.

Booker’s mother was a plantation cook and she was not able to pay attention towards her children. She could meet her children only early in the morning and late at night.

Booker was kept away from school because of slavery, as the right of education was only for the whites. When Booker went to school with his mistress, he used to hold her books. The sight of several dozen boys and
girls in school engaged in study made a deep impression on Booker and he felt that he should get a chance to get into a school house and study which he believed would be the same as getting into paradise.

Slaves were not allowed to gather together. Booker regrets that he had not experienced togetherness with his family as his mother would leave early in the morning for work and come late at night. When the boys would be hungry they would take their meals separately. Booker describes:

I cannot remember a single instance during my childhood or early hood when our entire family sat down to the table together and God’s blessing was asked and family ate a meal in a civilized manner.16

The slaves’ did not have proper clothes to wear and they had to wear very rough clothes which were called flax, that caused the skin injuries and it was very difficult to wear those clothes for many days. Booker had no leather shoes so he used to wear shoes made up of wood with leather covering. Washington described the honest nature and the loyalty of slaves in his autobiography. After freedom, the slaves never tried to take revenge against the Americans, but helped their masters in their bad days. Many slaves devoted their lives to their masters. Booker describes:

when the two young masters were brought home wounded, the sympathy of the slaves was shown in many ways. They were just an anxious to assist in the nursing as the family relatives of the wounded. Some of the slaves would even beg for the privilege of sitting up at night to nurse their wounded masters. This tenderness and sympathy on the part of those held in bondage was a result of their kindly and generous nature. In order to defend and protect the women and children who were left on the plantations when the white males went to war, the slaves would have laid down their lives. 17.
Slaves were exploited, oppressed and degraded by the customs and traditions of slavery. Booker himself suffered because of the customs and nature of slavery.

Richard Wright the author of the autobiography *Black Boy* described the customs and traditions of African American Community. Richard was born free, but he suffered from poverty and hunger. His father’s desertating his mother proved troublesome to him throughout his life.

There were no laws for the protection of the Blacks. Richard’s father had deserted his wife for a land lady and he went to live with her leaving his wife a destitute and children, orphans. He had not given any compensation to his wife and family. Richard worked in his childhood to overcome poverty. They did not have sufficient money to pay the rent of the house. They had to shift constantly from one place to another. Richard had no money to hospitalize his mother who was suffering from paralysis.

Another example of lawlessness for the Blacks is Richard’s Uncle Hoskins’ murder. The Whites murdered Uncle Hoskins who ran a liquor shop which flourished in a very short time. Whites asked Hoskins to close the shop but he did not pay attention to their threats. So they killed Uncle Hoskins without thinking about his family. His wife, Aunt Maggie was not allowed to see his dead body for the last time and they snatched away all his property.

Richard’s mother worked as a cook in a white family where she was paid a meagre amount which was spent on their meals. They were not able to pay the rent of the flat. Because of poverty Richard and his brother were sent to an orphanage. Richard tried to run away from there but was caught by police and again returned to an orphanage. He was handed over
to his mother. After that they had to face difficult conditions because of poverty. Meanwhile Richard’s mother suffered an attack of paralysis. Richard started working but his earnings were not enough to pay the rent of the flat so they had to shift from one flat to the other. Richard shifted out of the town in an old rail engine along with his mother. Richard informed his relatives about his mother’s illness. They all gathered together and decided to take her to his Granny’s house and Richard was shifted to Uncle Austen’s house. Richard was expelled from there because of his rude and uncivilized nature. Richard was then sent to his Granny’s house at Jackson. Richard’s granny was an ardent follower of the Methodists church. She forced Richard to attend the church. Richard was forced by his Granny to attend the church. He narrates:

Granny made imperative, however that I attend certain all night ritualistic prayer meetings. She was the oldest member of her church and it would have been unseemly if the only grandchild in her home could not be brought to these important services, she felt that if I were completely remiss in religious conformity it would cast doubt upon the staunchness of her faith, her capacity to convince and persuade or merely upon her ability to apply the rod to my backside.18.

Richard describes Granny’s religiousness:

In the home granny maintained a hard religious regime. There were prayers at sunup and sundown, at the breakfast table and dinner table, followed by a Bible verse from each member of the family and it was presumed that I prayed before I got time into bed at night .19.

Granny wanted Richard to follow the teachings of God by praying regularly. But, Richard was neither interested in praying nor attending the church. Granny prepared lunch and at all night attended the praying session and took Richard and Aunt Addie along with her to the church. There, in
the church, they chanted hymns and prayed to god. Richard wanted to go away from the church but when Granny came to know that Richard was not going to pray she and Aunt Addie cursed him and told him that he was dead to them and they were dead to him. Richard required books and clothes so he asked Granny for money but she refused him. Richard worked in a white family and by sold news papers and thus earned money. He successfully completed his graduation by working hard. Richard’s Granny never allowed him to read novels and story books because she believed that it was devil’s work. When Richard saw Ella reading, he asked her to tell him the story and as she was telling him the story Granny took away Richard from her and also drove her out from her house. Richard was harassed by his Granny on the basis of customs and traditions.

Dalit and African American Autobiographers were harassed and exploited by the customs and traditions of the society and also by their own customs.

Dalit and African American autobiographers through their autobiographies, depict the illiteracy and superstiousness of their communities. Their communities blindly followed the customs, traditions and religiousness from one generation to the other. They were exploited to such an extent that they could not think beyond their condition of maltreatment and miseries. They thought that it was Gods’ will and so they had surrendered to their social and cultural suppression.

Laxman in *Upara – An Outsider* has given a number of examples of superstiousness and illiteracy among the community members of the Kaikadi community. Laxman Mane was the only person from his community who went to school and completed his education successfully. Before him no one even thought of going to school. Laxman narrates:
I was absolutely ignorant of everything. Not one of my forefathers had ever set foot in a school. As the slate to others was the basket to us – such as the one father wove.20.

Laxman’s sister Sami suffered from epileptic attacks. But, his parents never took her to the hospital; instead they prayed to God and sacrificed goats. They believed that it was not illness but, her suffering was the result of her being possessed by evil spirit. By applying turmeric and sacred ash on her forehead they waited for her to come to her senses. Laxman’s father went to the dunghill and brought a blob of cow-dung, lit it and sat near the burning blob trying to invoke the God. After sometime he was possessed by the god and began to utter the terrible cries. These incidents brings out the religious nature of the Kaikadis who have blind faith in their God. They offer goats to please their god, without realising that God was not hungry for their goats, but he was hungry for true and real devotees.

Kaikadi’s don’t have food to eat but they celebrate each and every festival by offering goats to their god by taking loan from the village Sahukar. Kaikadi’s celebrate the festival of Goddess Kalubai because they believe that she protects them from evil spirits, phantoms and ghosts. Laxman recalls:

These poor nomadic tribals come to seek the blessings of the Mother Goddess. She protects them. Neither ghosts, nor phantom nor any other supernatural elements could harm them.21.

Laxman’s father practiced exorcism to cure people who were possessed by ghosts. Kaikadi’s lived in the darkness of illiteracy and superstitions. Like Kaikadi’s, the Uchalya’s too much were bound to their illiteracy and superstition. Laxman Gaikwad’s mother died because of her the
superstitious nature. She used to take the herbs and other medicines given by the local man who knew how to capture evil spirit. All the family members strictly believed that she was possessed by evil spirit and that was the reason for her continued illness. Finally she herself asked to be taken to Jawali. They took her to Jawali but because of improper diagnosis and lack of proper treatment her illness aggravated and she died. Laxman’s mother could have been saved if she would have been admitted to hospital and given proper treatment.

Hunger and poverty were a part and parcel of the life of Uchalays. They were branded as thieves so no one from the village dared to give them permanent jobs. They earned their livelihood by doing seasonable jobs or by thieving. They were ready to do anything like black magic.

Laxman narrates:

We never saw comfortable days in our household. It was always poverty and a wretched, groveling life. Only on major festival days did we prepare chapattis out of hardly a quarter kilo wheat. That too under the haunting fears of the evil black magic of a sorceress. We suspected that our neighbor my cousins – Anjanli- indulged in Sorcery. So we always kept making nuts and cowrie shells at hand, while boiling puran.22.

Uchalays lived in the darkness of illiteracy and ignorance for more than hundred years. Laxman was the only boy from the community who attended school. His father brought books, notebooks and a pen for Laxman and told him to take care of the books. Laxman had written in the notebook and when his father saw that if he thought that Laxman had misused the notebook by writing on it and as a result he whipped him. Laxman’s community members were against Laxman’s schooling. They
believed that schooling and education was not their right. It was the right of the high caste people. By going to school Laxman was violating the law and this would result in the Goddess” curse on the whole Kaikadi community. When Laxman was going to school, suddenly the neighbouring children started suffering from severe stomach disorders. The neighbours started quarreling with Laxman’s father, stating that his son’s education made their children suffer from loose motions. Laxman recalls:

This was happening because of you only as you have admitted your children to the school. Has anybody from the thieves’ community ever gone to school? Oh martand ! Schooling was never good for us. Has anybody from our forefathers ever gone to school? If our children started going to school our race would be doomed. Goddess vellamma will be furious. Look Martand, if your son continues to go to school, we shall call the Pancvahyat and ostracize you.23.

Uchalya’s eat wild animals. When there was no food they went for fishing. They have their own way of fishing. Laxman went along with his grandfather, Tata for fishing. On the way to home his grand father told him to spit to keep away from the evil spirit. Laxman spent his entire childhood in illiteracy and superstition.

Kishore Kale has described illiteracy that penetrated throughout the Kolhati community. Kishore was born in the Kolhati community. Women from the community performed in the tamasha and earned money for the entire household. Men from the community made merry from the income of the women. They did not work and to the contrary they believed working for livelihood below their dignity. They were wandering in the darkness of illiteracy and did not allow education to others from the community. Kishore narrates their plight:
Most Kolhati girls are sent off to learn dancing when they are nine or ten years old because their young bodies are flexible and can be easily trained. Many of these girls never go to school. But Shanta had spent 7 long years in school dreaming of becoming a school teacher. She was a teenager when she was forced to learn dancing and her body never acquired the flexibility and grace that women who started young had.

Like Uchalyas they also believed that education and schooling was not intended for them. Their work was to play drums and tabla in the tamasha. Kishore’s grandfather Kondiba refused to send him to school. Kishore attended the school without his grandfather’s will. Kishore’s grandfather never gave him money to buy books and notebooks. By doing odd jobs Kishore earned money and completed his education up to 6th standard. His Grandfather told him to stop education. Kishore recalls:

You have studied upto 7th and that is enough more, in fact, than any Kolhati boy. There is no need to study any further. It is not as if you are going to get a job or something you better learn to work in the fields or join the jalsa Party and learn to play the dholak. I can buy you a couple of buffaloes and half a dozen goats.

Kishore did not paid attention to his grandfather and continued his education and became a doctor. Kishore’s relatives were impressed at his success in 12th exam as he stood second in the merit list among the backward classes and secured admission in medical college at Mumbai.

Kishore’s mother, Shantabai is also the example of illiteracy. Her husband used to always beat her for not paying attention to him and also for not letting him indulge in lottery. She believed that husband was like a God and she literally prayed to him. On festivals she washed his feet and she never denied his word. Shantabai was bitterly harassed by Wadkar. It is
a pitiable state not only of women but the society that propagated such culture.

Like Dalit autobiographers African American autobiographers also suffered because of superstition and illiteracy.

African Americans were slaves and were intentionally denied the right to education. White Americans feared that education would incorporate power in African Americans and they would throw away the bondage and ask for equality and liberty.

Douglass and Washington were the victims of slavery. Douglass rendered his youth in the slavery. Washington faced slavery upto eight years and after the Civil War slaves were declared free. Richard Wright was not a slave. He was born a freeman. But because of his race and colour he was oppressed and exploited by the White Americans.

African Americans could not protest against the injustices due to their ignorance and they had accepted the suffering, exploitation, maltreatment as fruits of their sins of the past life.

A very systematic arrangement in the form of slavery was imposed by the White Americans on the African Americans because of which the slaves were not able to rebel against their master. Salves were not allowed to have families neither did they keep records of birth and death. African Americans, in the early period accepted slavery because no one was literate. The agitation of the Negro Association for the rights of African American brought an awareness regarding education and the rights among the blacks. Since the rise of Negro Association and Black Arts movement Blacks continuously demanded rights as a human being. Washington was supported by his family members to attend school and also his community
members encouraged him to attend the Hampton Institute. On the way to Hampton Institute his community members gave him a nickel and handkerchief as a gift. They encouraged Washington because in the form of Washington they were going to take education. They had spent their whole life in the darkness of slavery and ignorance and now in the last phase of their life they started thinking that like them their future generations should not be made to live as the life of slaves. Because of their illiteracy they were not able to free themselves from the bondage. Washington recalls:

Perhaps the thing that touched and pleased me most in connection with my starting for Hampton was the interest that many of the older coloured people took in the matter. They had spent the best days of their lives in the slavery. And hardly expected to live to see the time when they would see a member of their race leave home to attend a boarding school. Some of these older people would give me a nickel, others a quarter, or a handkerchief”.26.

On the other hand Dalit autobiographers were not allowed to attend school by their own community members. They were not ready to come out of the darkness of illiteracy as they were staunch followers of their traditions and customs. African Americans, after hundred years of slavery realised the reason behind their slavery. Soon after freedom they tried to get into schools. They started schools for their children. Washington started the Tuskegee Institute for the coloured children. His aim was to educate children not only academically but also to provide them technical education to enable them to live a life of dignity.

Richard Wright has painted the picture of superstitions among the African Americans in the Black Boy. Richard recalls:
If I pulled a hair from a horse’s tail and sealed it in a jar of my own urine, the hair would turn over night into a snake.

If I passed a Catholic sister or mother dressed in black and smiled and allowed her to see my teeth, I would surely die.

If I walked under a leaning leader I would certainly have bad luck.

If I kissed my elbow, I would turn into a girl.

If my right ear itched, then something good was being said about me by somebody.

If I touched a hunch back’s hump then I would never be sick.

If I placed a safety pin on a steel railroad track and let a train over it the safety pin would turn into pair of bright brand new scissors.

If I heard a voice and no human being was hear, then either god or the devil was trying to talk me.

Whenever I made urine, I should spit into it for good luck.

If my nose itched, somebody was going to visit me.

If I mocked a crippled man, then god would make me crippled.

If I used the name of god in vain then god would strike me dead.

If it rained while the sun was shining, then the devil was bathing his wife.27.

Richard describes the religiousness of his Granny. His Granny, who, was an ardent follower of the Adventists Church. She did not allow Richard to read novels and stories.

In Dalit and African American autobiographies we have seen the impact of superstition and illiteracy on the society and culture of Dalit and African Americans. The life of the autobiographer was very much influenced by illiteracy and superstition. Dalit and African American Autobiographers received inspiration and encouragement to fight against
Slavery from various people they met. It was not easy to counter the traditions and customs that had been firmly rooted in the society.

Laxman Mane was encouraged by his father to take education. Despite the fact his father spent his life wandering from one village to the other in search of livelihood. He spent his entire life without dignity and pride in very miserable conditions. He did not want his son has to face exploitation and live an undignified life so his father admitted Laxman to school. Laxman’s father went to the school in every village they halted and sought permission from the school master for Laxman’s education.

Laxman’s father, Martand, encouraged him to take education and become a teacher or an officer. To fulfill his father’s desire, Laxman completed his education amidst hardships. Laxman completed his graduation from the Kolhapur University. He was influenced by Prof. Patgaonkar and because of him he was attracted towards the Seva Dal. Whenever there were camps, discussions and seminars, Prof. Patagonkar sent Laxman there on his personal expenses. Prof. Patagonkar’s help inspired Laxman for social work.

Another influential character in the life of Laxman Mane is Bhausaheb Khandekar. Laxman read all the books written by him and was influenced by his thoughts. Laxman describes:

I had read all the books written by Bhausaheb Khandekar and was haunted by them. I was developing liking for some social work.28.

Laxman Mane started his social career by participating against the rally of Shankaryacharya. Laxman came in contact with Prof. Managaonkar, Baburao Paritekar and Nanasaheb Mane, who were members of the Dalit Youth Association and in a very short time he started a new association.
along with his friends called Dr. Ambedkar School of Thoughts and under its auspices he had started a primary school for children in the settlement of a nomadic tribe.

Dr. Narendra Dabholkar was one of the most influential persons in the life of Laxman Mane. Dr. Dabholkar helped Laxman Mane in his worst days when no one was ready to help him. Dr. Dabholkar gave him food to eat and helped him to get a job. In the very first meeting, Dr. Dabholkar gave grains and other necessary groceries to Laxman. He describes:

As I sat looking at the photos on the room, the doctor crossed the threshold of the door of the inner room loaded with six or seven bagful of provisions: wheat, rice, jawar, lentils... he emptied all the boxes of the provisions into the bags and brought a can of Kerosene and a kettle of groundnut oil.

Laxman’s wife Shashi played a very important role in his life. Laxman loved Shashi but because of his low caste he did not want to marry her. But, she boldly told Laxman that she was ready to leave her parent’s house and was prepared to live with him and face worst circumstances for him. Laxman married Shashi with the help of his friends and dignitaries like Bhausaheb Khandekar and Prof. Patagonkar. Shashi always supported Laxman in his work. She never suffered from poverty and hunger like Laxman though she lived with him. She always assured Laxman and her support became his source of inspiration.

Laxman Gaikwad was influenced by many personalities and some of them left an indelible print on his life. Laxman could study because of his father’s encouragement. Before Laxman no one from the Uchalya community had attended school. Laxman’s father worked as a farm watchman in Chamel’s farm. There he had seen his master’s children go to school regularly and thus he became aware of the importance of education.
He always encouraged Laxman to take education. It was not possible for Laxman to continue studies after matriculation because of poverty. Poverty often proved to be a big hurdle in his way. Laxman took job as a worker in a spinning mill at Latur to make both ends meet.

But there too he was exploited and had to suffer. He agitated against the injustices and sought justice by getting the wages increased and also bonus for the workers. Laxman came in contact with Adv. Bhagwanrao Deshpande, who proved a very good friend and a well wisher to Laxman. With the help of Bhagwanrao Deshpande Laxman brought together all workers under the banner of INTUC at Latur. But he was expelled from the mill because of his work for the upliftment and welfare of the workers. At that time no one was ready to help Laxman. Adv. Deshpande extended his hand of friendship by helping him in various ways. He gave Laxman a loan from the bank to set up a bicycle shop.

Laxman’s wife Chhabu was always with him in his up and downs. Laxman severally beat Chhabu but, like an honest wife she accepted all his beating without complaining.

Laxman’s brother’s and sister’s always told ill things about Chhabu to Laxman and without judging the authenticity of those things he would beat her. With Laxman, Chhabu received nothing but hunger, poverty and humiliation. She accepted all those sufferings and sorrows and displayed her faith in Laxman.

The two major important persons in the life of Kishore Kale were his mother - Shantabai and Jiji who brought up Kishore and loved him like a son. After completing MBBS Kishore started a social organization in the name of Jiji called ‘Tarabai Memorial Sanstha’ and under this organization he started Shantabai Dawakhana in the memory of his mother, at Kuderan
on the borders of Thane and Raigad districts. Jiji played a more important role in Kishore’s life than his mother because after being abandoned by his mother no one was ready to accept Kishore, but Jiji came forward and brought up Kishore like her own child. Kishore started his autobiography with Jiji.

Jiji loved Kishore like her own son. Jiji owned 25 acres of land and after her husband’s death she worked on the farm. When Kishore was living with his grandfather Kondiba, he was always beaten. Jiji was very keen towards Kishore. She gave him Chivada which Kishore like of the most and also described her love for Kishore. Kishore recalls:

Sitting down, Jiji took out a packet of my favourite Chivda (pounded rice, fried and flavoured). I ate it eagerly and she watched me with great satisfaction. Every once in a way she would feed me with her hands. She did not touch her bhakari till I had finished the chivda.30.

Kishore recalls the care of Jiji thus, once Shanatabai had been to her parents at Nerla and when she was returning to her husband, Kishore cried a lot and was not letting her to go to Parbhani. In a fit of anger he struck his head on the stone and got injured. Jiji rushed towards him and applied bandage by tearing her sari. Kishore recalls:

My head, which I had been rolling from side to side, suddenly struck a stone and it started bleeding. Jiji quickly tore a piece of her sari and bandaged the wound.31.

Kishore was attracted towards school because of his mother Shantabai. Kishore wanted to live with his mother but he realized that only after getting education he would be able to live with her. He went to Gawali guruji and asked to admit him to the school. Gawali guruji told
Kishore that his mother was a very bright student in the school. Those words ignited Kishore’s desire for getting education.

Kishore saw the miserable condition of women in the Kolhati community. Women were exploited by their own family members. The pitiable condition of woman from Kolhati community enraged Kishore. He wanted to help the women but he was too young to help them. Kishore’s anger after on became a source of inspiration to himself and he overcame all the barriers in his way towards education and became a doctor.

In Frederick Douglass’s life too there are many personalities who left mark on his personality. Douglass was a born slave and he was shifted from one master to another. Some master’s like Auld, Mrs. Lucertia proved to be good and kind to him. But on the other hand masters like Covey proved to be cruel and harsh. Frederick Douglass was working as a slave in Lloyd’s plantation. He worked for Miss Lucretia Auld, who was very kind towards Frederick. Uncle Abel’s son ‘Ike’ and protagonist fought between themselves and Ike hit Frederick on the forehead but Frederick’s cold-hearted Aunt Katy paid no attention to his wound or to his roaring. Miss Lucretia called Frederick to her parlour and with her soft hand she washed away the blood from his forehead and face fetched her own balsam bottle with which she treated the wound.

Frederick felt secure because of his two friends namely Mas’ Daniel at the great house and Miss Lucretia at home. Douglass recalls:

From Mas Daniel I got protection from bigger boys and from Miss Lucretia I got bread by singing when I was hungry and sympathy when I was abused by that teemagant.32
Frederick was despaired because of the cruelties of his master and Aunt Katey. In depression he thought why he was born? Douglass describes his condition in following words:

The cruelty of Aunt Katey, the hunger and cold I suffered, and the terrible reports of wrong and outrage which came to my ear, together with what I almost daily witnessed led me, when yet but eight or nine years old to wish I had never been born. I used to contrast my condition with the black birds in whose wild and sweet songs I fancied them so happy. I was just as well aware of the unjust, unnatural and murderous character of slavery, when nine years old, as I am now.33.

Another personality who influenced Douglass was Mrs. Auld. Douglass was shifted to Mr. Auld to Baltimore to his new master. There he was treated like a human being. He got a mother in the form of Mrs. Auld. Frederick was surprised and became happy with the welcome given by the Auld family. He describes his feeling in the following words:

I was struck with the appearance of my new mistress. Her face was lighted with the kindliest emotions, and the reflex influence of her countenance, as well as the tenderness with which she seemed to regard me, while asking me sundry little questions, greatly delighted me, and lit up, to my fancy, the pathway of my future. Miss Lucreti was kind but my new Mistress Miss Sophy surpassed her in kindness of manner.34.

Douglass describes the nature of Mrs. Auld:

Mrs. Auld was naturally, of an excellent disposition, kind gentle and cheerful. The dear lady, no doubt owed the excellent preservation of her natural goodness of heart, for slavery can change a saint into a sinner and an angel into a demon.35.

Mrs. Auld was very caring towards Douglass. She did not make any difference between her son and Douglass. In fact, Mrs. Auld taught Douglass to read.
Douglass was shifted to Covey who was a very cruel person. Douglass became very desperate because of his masters regular beating. In depression he thought of the treatment given to him by Mrs. Auld.

Douglass recalls:

I had left a kind mistress at Baltimore who was almost a mother to me. She was in tears when we parted and the probabilities of ever seeing her again tremble in the balance as they did could not be viewed without alarm and agog.36.

At the early age of thirteen Douglass came to read the thoughts of Sheridan and got influenced by it as he mentioned it in following words:

From the speeches of Sheridan, I got a bold and powerful denunciation of oppression and a most brilliant vindication of the rights of man. I had now penetrated the secret of all slavery and oppression and had ascertained their true foundation to be in the pride, the power and the avarice of man. The dialogue and the speeches were all redolent of the principles of liberty, and poured floods of light on the nature and character of slavery.37.

Douglass was influenced by the thoughts of Sheridan. He realized that slavery enabled Whites to achieve power and dignity. Douglass read the speeches and was inspired to throw out the cudgels of slavery.

Uncle Lawson was another influencing character in the life of Douglass. He was his spiritual father. Douglass recalls:

Uncle Lawson threw my thoughts into a channel from which they have never entirely diverged. He fanned my already intense love of knowledge into a flame by assuring me that I was to be a useful man in the world. When I would say to him, “How can these things be and what can I do?” his simple reply was “Trust in the Lord” When I told him that, “I was a slave and a slave for life.” He said, “The Lord can make you free, my dear, all things are possible with him only have faith in God. Ask and it shall be given. If you want liberty
said the good old man, ask the Lord for it in faith and he will give it to you.38.

Douglass was influenced by the Liberator, a newspaper edited by William Lloyd Garrison. Douglass came to know the cruelties of slavery from the distant parts of America and about the Abolitionists Movement through the Liberator. Douglass later worked with the Antislavery Movement.

Douglass was influenced by the thoughts and views of Garrison as he describes:

The liberator was a paper after my own heart. It detested slavery, exposed hypocrisy and wickedness in high places. Made no trace with the traffickers in the bodies and souls of men, it preached human brotherhood, denounced oppression and with all the solemnity of God’s word, and demanded the complete emancipation of my race.39.

After escaping from his master, Douglass fought against difficulties like hunger, shelter, employment with hard work and strong will power and overcame all the difficulties. He describes his situation in the following words:

The three years of my freedom had been spent in the hard school of adversity. My hands had been furnished by nature with something like a solid leather coating, and I had bravely marked out for myself a life of rough labor, suited to the hardness of my hands, as a means of supporting myself and rearing my children.40.

Douglass’s wife played an important role in his life. She always supported him in his up and downs. She used to deliver lectures on the antislavery movement and helped Douglass to prepare the drafts of his speeches. She encouraged Douglass in his bad days. Douglass could overcome poverty
because of her moral support. He worked day and night for three years and after that he participated in the Antislavery Movement.

African Americans were declared free after the Civil War. The important persons in Washington’s life were his mother, Mrs. Ruffner, General S.C. Armstrong, Mrs. Mary F. Mackie his wives – Miss. Olivia A. Davidson, Ms. Fannie N. Smith and Miss Margaret James Murray.

Washington’s mother encouraged him to take education. She bought Webster’s book from which Washington learnt to write alphabets. Mrs. Ruffer was another influential character in the life of Washington. She inspired Washington to take education and to go to Hampton Institute. Mrs. Ruffner was the wife of a coal mine owner where Washington worked during his childhood. Washington recalls:

During the one or two winters that I was with her she gave me an opportunity to go to school for an hour in the day during a portion of the winter months, but most of my studying was done at night, sometime alone Mrs. Ruffner always encouraged and sympathizes me in all my efforts to get an education.41.

Another influencing character was Miss Mary Mackie the Head teacher of Hampton Institute. Miss Mary F. Mackie proved to be one of the strongest and most helpful friends to Booker. Her advice and encouragement were always helpful and strengthened Booker in the darkest hour.

Washington was influenced by General Armstrong. His life changed when he came in contact with General Armstrong. Washington received important massage from Armstrong that no books can provide education better than the life and experiences of great personalities like Armstrong. Washington recalls:
The older I grow the more I am convinced that there is no education which one can get from books and costly apparatus that is equal to that which can be gotten from contact with great men and women. Instead of studying Books so constantly how I wish that our schools and colleges might learn to study men and things.42.

Booker’s life changed completely because of Hampton Institute. He received a way to live life i.e. to live for others. Washington started Tuskegee Institute for the coloured children. Washington recalls the influence of Hampton Institute:

The greatest benefits that I got out of my life at the Hampton Institute perhaps may be classified under two heads –
1) Contact with a great man, General S.C. Armstrong, Strongest and most beautiful character that it has ever been my privilege to meet.
2) For the first time, I learned what education was expected to do for an individual before going there I had a prevalent idea among our people that to secure an education meant to have a good easy time free from all necessity for manual labour.
At Hampton I not only learned that it was not a disgrace to labour but learned to love labour not alone for its financial value but for labour’s own sake and for the independence and self-reliance which the ability to do something which the world wants done brings. At this institute I got my first taste of what it meant to live a life of unselfishness my first knowledge of the fact that the happiest individuals are those who do the most to make others useful and happy.43.

Booker was influenced by General Armstrong who was among those people who had experienced oppression and suppression at the hands of Americans throughout their lives though they were not going to utter any bitter words for White Americans. General Armstrong was a very kind hearted and pure soul who felt happy in others happiness. He devoted his life in spreading happiness among his fellow beings.
Booker T. Washington had three wives. All of them helped Washington to raise the Tuskegee Institute to the highest position. Miss Davidson was Washington’s second wife. He married her after the death of Fannie N. Smith. Miss Davidson helped Washington to raise money for the Tuskegee Institute. She visited North and South continuously for collecting charity from coloured people for the Tuskegee Institute. As Washington described about her efforts:

For sometimes before our marriage, and also after it, Miss Davidson kept up the work of securing money in the North and in the South by interesting people by personal visits and through correspondence. At the same time she kept in close touch the work at Tuskegee, as lady principal and classroom teacher. In addition to this, she worked among the older people in and near Tuskegee, and taught a Sunday school class in the town. She was never very strong but never seemed happy unless she was giving all of her strength to the cause which she loved. Often, at night after spending the day in going from door to door trying to interest person in the work at Tuskegee she would be so exhausted that she could not undress herself. A lady upon whom she called, in Boston afterworld told me that at one time when Miss Davidson called to see her and sent her card the lady was detained a little before she could see Miss Davidson and when she entered the parlour she found Miss Davidson so exhausted that she had fallen asleep.

Miss Davidson had worked a lot for the development of the Tuskegee Institute. Washington was always in a tension of paying debts to the creditors but his debts were cleared by Miss Davidson because many times, she collected a handsome amount from coloured people and sent it to Washington on the right time. Davidson died in 1889.

Washington married Miss Fannie N Smith who was very helpful to Washington in his ups and downs. He narrates:
From the first, my wife most earnestly devoted her thoughts and time to work of the school and was completely one with me in every interest and ambition. She passed away however, before she had an opportunity of seeing what the school was designed to be.

In 1893 Washington got married to Miss Margaret James Murray. Mrs. Washington not only taught in the Tuskegee but also carried on a mothers meeting in the town of Tuskegee and Plantation work for the women, children and men who lived in a settlement connected to a large plantation about eight miles from Tuskegee. Washington had three children, daughter Portia, sons - Booker Taliaferro, Earnest and Davidson Washington.

Richard Wright’s life was influenced mostly by his mother, father, Granny and Aunt Addie.

Richard was educated by some positive and negative mentors. The coalman taught him numbers and his mother taught him words and tools that could ultimately liberate him. But Miss Simon taught him to use bottles – to soak up the hegalistic requirements of a society. She killed something in him, the narrator recalls just as the adults in the bar who had forced the young boy to beg for pennies and became childhood drunkards also killed something, his dignity. When his father duplicated that kind of education, offering his hungry child a nickel, the conflict in Richard’s education became apparent – should we learn to be a fool as his father warned his mother (Dont teach him to be a fool).

Richard was rejected by his family and he also rejected them. This dual rejection serves Richard resisting his family not only taught him in a general way to resist white racists but it also provided a specific map to him to find a way out of the fate he felt awaited him.
Richard’s father’s identity brought a crucial change in his personality. When Richard complained of hunger, his mother insisted that he would have to wait for God to send food because his father had gone. Richard saw his father one last time in boyhood, at the home of his fathers’ mistress. He recalls:

> We left, I had the feeling that I had had to do with something unclean. Maytimes in the years after that the image of my father and the strange woman, their faces lit up by the dancing flames, would surge up in my imagination so vivid and strong that I felt I could reach out and touch it. I would stare at it. Feeling that it possessed some vital meaning which always eluded me.46.

According to Albert E. Stone:

> the fire represents the sexual passion which separates and unites father, mother and mistress and which likewise includes the child who, looking into the coals, sees himself an unconscious participation in the sexual drama.47.

As a child, all Richard knew that he was on one side of the room and his father was on the other and between them a bright fire that blazed in and the gap between them was not as wide as Richard would have thought it to be. Even not knowing what other life was possible for him; Richard instinctively rejected the narrow path, and degraded life his father had chosen. With Richard’s father, out of the picture, his grandmother became the head of the family and an authority figure. She was a religious woman, a fanatic, 7th day Adventists according to Wright and from the very beginning her religiosity conflicted with Richard’s free expression:

> I was dreaming of running and playing and shouting. The first paragraph of the autobiography goes but the vivid image of Granny’s old white, wrinkled grim face framed by a halo of rumbling black hair – made me afraid.48.
Under the shadow of Granny’s religiosity Richard was turning towards his writing career. He had written an Indian love story which was burnt by his Granny. Richard was forced to pray to God by his Granny:

at the age of 12, having promised Granny to pray hard Richard goes up to his room every afternoon but everything “I could think of saying seemed silly “ failing even at writing hymn verse Richard claims that ‘ the holy ghost was simply nowhere near me.49.

Richard’s first work of art emerged under the pressure of Granny’s religiosity. As if he had taken his directions from her, Richard created not a prayer but exactly the kind of work that his Granny burnt. The crucial difference between Richard and his father was that the sun succumbs not to passion but to art, the difference between Richard and his grand mother was that while she used religion to withdraw from a world she found intolerable, he sought a way through words, as Wright put it, to alter his relationship with his environment and thereby to prove himself to be a freeman. From Richard’s point of view Granny and others like her fly to religion as an answer to the pain for their existence. However so that he may find the words to describe life he has known and in describing that life create a new one for himself.

All the six autobiographers are influenced by various personalities. Every person left remarkable mark of his identity on the life of the autobiographers.

Laxman Mane and Laxman Gaikwad were influenced by their fathers’. Their fathers encouraged them to take education. Kishore Kale was influenced by Jiji and his mother Shantabai. Douglass was influenced by Mrs. Auld who taught him to read the Bible. Washington is influenced by
his Mother, General Armstrong and by the Hampton institute. Richard Wright was influenced by his mother, father and Granny.

Every community, village, city, nation have its own culture. Culture is completely based on the ancestors from whom the other culture gets transferred with subtle changes in it. Speaking about Dalit and African American culture, there is a similarity between both the communities that they were enslaved for more than hundred of years. They were denied life as human beings and suffered casticism, racial, social and economic exploitation and injustices. Dalits and African American forged and nurtured a culture and maintained kinship networks, made love, raised and socialized children, built religion and created a rich expressive culture in which they articulated their feelings, hopes and dreams.

African American’s were caught in double consciousness – whether they belonged to America or Africa. They have their own culture that is African, but it was contaminated by the Americans by imposing slavery on them. They were influenced by their masters and attracted towards the White culture.

The same condition existed in India. Dalits are the victims of the caste system and they were oppressed by the Hindus. They were untouchables. Some of the people of the Dalit community came under the influence of the Hindus, for instance, their living styles have changed and they left their small towns and migrated to bigger cities for jobs. This is a major shift in both the communities.

Laxman Mane in his autobiography *Upara – An Outsider* has given the example of cultural impact of the high caste Hindus. Education brought a revolutionary change in the life of Laxman Mane. Laxman Mane, in his childhood lived on the dunghills out of the town in a small hut. He had no
proper clothes to wear as he has described in the autobiography in the opening scene that he had no shorts to wear. His shirt was long enough to cover his whole body. Laxman went to school dressed only in his shirt. When he sat in the classroom his shirt exposed his remaining body which created large hubbub in the classroom as a result his teacher always scolded him. Laxman Mane ran from his house because his parents wanted Laxman to marry but Laxman wanted to continue education. Laxman himself noticed improvement in his personality brought by his education. Laxman narrates:

My manners had improved greatly I had began showing a certain respect to my parents, my language and expression had undergone a sea change.

Laxman ran away from his house and went to Kolhapur for further studies. In Kolhapur he sought admission to Kirti College. Laxman was wonderstruck to see the free atmosphere in colleges and Universities. Laxman was beaten by his father because he just stood near a Maratha girl for taking a photograph. Mixing up with high caste people was prohibited in the village. There were separate queues for boys and girls and for backward class students in the village. In Kolhapur, boys and girls talked freely with each other. They sat beside each other on one bench. Laxman narrates:

There were about one hundred and fifty students in each class. The teachers delivered lectures. Boys and Girls sat together the city boys and girls talked to each other so freely that I was wonderstruck. They behaved like actors and actresses.

Laxman’s behaviour and personality changed with time and he became aware of the outside world, beyond his town. In his village Laxman used to speak in Kaikadi dialect, so nobody except Kaikadi’s understood
his language. All the people laughed at Laxman because of his language. When Laxman lived in Kolhapur, his lifestyle changed completely. He started wearing shirt and trousers instead of pajama and shirt. His dialect also changed. He started speaking like city boys and girls. The Kaikadi community did not permit people to marry out of their community hence the community would ostracize the entire family. No one was ready to serve water to the ostracised family. Laxman married a high class Maratha girl Shahsi and was excommunicated by the Kaikadi Panchayat. No one was ready to marry Laxman’s brother because of his intercaste marriage. The Panchayat asked Laxman to marry Shashi as per Kaikadi rules and customs but before that Shashi had to be converted into the Kaikadi community. By doing as per the customs and laws of the Kaikadi community, Laxman once again married Shashi.

Laxman Gaikwad’s life is nothing different than Laxman Mane. In his autobiography *Uchalya – The Branded*, Laxman Gaikwad has introduced us to the culture, customs and traditions of Uchalya community, a nomadic tribe.

Uchalya’s have their own festivals and marriage system. According to the laws of the Uchalya community, no one was permitted to marry out of their community as intercaste marriage would result into excommunication from the society. Laxman Gaikwad’s father Martand was working on Chamels’s farm as a watchman. There he had seen Chamels children go to school regularly. Martand also sent Laxman to school regularly by facing the opposition of his community members and also high class people. Laxman became aware about his clothing, his ways of living and life style as well. Laxman was invited by his friend Dattu Sawant for dinner to his house. He went for dinner but he was not aware of the civilized ways of
eating. In his village, he had to eat the food in plates or sometimes in bare hands. They were all ignorant about their living and eating styles. Laxman was disturbed by the treatment given to him by the family members of Dattu Sawant. Laxman was given paat (wooden platform) to sit and then served Rice, papad and vegetables separately in bowls. Laxman was not familiar with this way of eating and he felt embarrassed. Dattu understood his condition and told him about the civilized ways of eating following words:

Look Laxman, always remember that you are not to use your left hand to eat anything. When you are taking food on festival days, you should put little water with your hand round your plate and then put a few drops of it in your mouth. Then put a little curry on your rice and eat it not everything but Chapati should be cut into small pieces with your right hand and while you are eating chapatti eat it with pakora and sometimes with vegetables and remember very well you are never to pick up and wash your plate. After meals wait for all to wash their hands first and then wash your hands.

When Laxman went to his elder sister in law’s younger brother’s marriage at Salgara, the marriage rituals were stopped by the community members because the mother of the girl, who was to be married, was tainted. She had not got herself purified in Uchalya Panchayat.

The relatives of bridegroom and the bride had willingly and happily come together and negotiated the marriage, but the Panchayat interfered and stopped the marriage. The Panchas came out with their proposal that the woman should eat shit; others said that she should be fined Rs.2000, while some other proposed that her nose be cut off. Finally one of the Panchas proposed a viable middle course that the bride’s mother’s head be shaved. The Panchas agreed to this proposal unanimously and it was decided that woman’s head would be shaved. Laxman was frustrated with
illiteracy of the community members by observing the incident. Laxman narrates:

My head went numb with all that I had witnessed. How backward and suppositious could our community be! What a horrible sense was I witness to! No one side was the advanced urban society and on the other, our community – Panchayat. I found the functioning of the Panchayat obnoxious and disgusting I was, small fry, however before this gigantic social monster.53.

Laxman understood the backwardness and uncivilized condition of his community. He came out of that condition with the help of education and forced others too, to come out of it.

Kishore through his autobiography, Against All odds described the customs, traditions and the culture of Kolhati community.

In both the autobiographies Upara – An Outsider and Uchalya – The Branded we have seen that men from the community are responsible for the livelihood of family. But in the Kolhati community we have seen a different culture. In Kolhati community, it is the woman’s responsibility to earn livelihood for the family and men only enjoyed their lives. They never allowed their wives to dance in a Jalsa party. Kishore Kale penned the overall picture of the Kolhati community. They travelled from one village to the other by arranging dance programmes called tamasha. While performing in the tamasha, many men came in the lives of women their life. The same happened with Kishore’s mother, Shantabai. She married Krushanrao Wadkar and went with him to Parbhani leaving Kishore at his grandfather, Kondiba’s house. Kishore Kale made his life a symbol of hard work and set an example for his community members. His grandfather did not allow Kishore to learn and became literate. He used to tell him to learn
to play tabla which would help him in his future. But, Kishore with hard work became a doctor.

Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington faced slavery. Both of them were born on plantation. Booker T. Washington became free when he was only nine years old but Douglass lost childhood and youth in slavery. Slaves did not have their own culture and they were influenced by their master’s culture. Douglass has described the plantation culture in the following words- “A very low treatment was given to slaves by their masters. Very low quality of food was given to eat especially ash cake and stale pieces of meat, bread and butter. The clothes provided by their masters were also of very low quality”. Douglass describes:

The men and women slaves received as their monthly allowance of food, eight pounds of pickled pork, or their equivalent in fish. The pork was often tainted and the fish was of the poorest quality – herrings which would bring very little if offered for sale in any northern market. This was the entire monthly allowance of a full grown slave working constantly in the open field from morning until night, everyday in the month except Sunday and living on a fraction more than a quarter of a pound of meat per day, and less than a pack of cornmeal per week. The yearly allowance of clothing for the slaves on this plantation consisted of two linen shirts- such linen as the coarsest crash towels are made of one pair of trousers and a jacket of woolen, most slaily put together for winter one pair of yarn stockings, and one pair of shoes of the coarsest description. The slave entire apparel could not have cost more than 8 dollars per year.54.

The slave owners created sleeping apartments for their slaves on the plantation. They were forced to sleep in very desperate conditions. Males, females, old people and children slept together. They were very tired because of the heavy work that they did not care to see with whom they were sleeping. Douglass describes their poor condition:
If they may be called such – have little regard to comfort or
decency. Old and young, male and female married and single
dropdown upon the common clay floor, each covering up
with his or her blanket, the only protection they have from
cold or exposure. The night, however is shortened at both
ends. The slaves work often as long as they can see and are
late in working and mending for the coming day and at the
first gray streak of morning they are summoned to the field by
the driver’s horn.55.

The slave master did not provide ample food to their slaves and because of
hunger the slaves stole food from their masters Douglass himself stole food
from his master. Douglass recalls:

I frankly confess that while I hated everything like stealing as
such I nevertheless did not hesitate to take food, when I was
hungry whenever I could find it.56.

The slave owners intentionally gave holidays to their slaves to keep
them in Slavery. Douglass was against these holidays. He revealed that
those holidays were nothing but the trick of their masters to keep them
enslaved and it was an effective tool of keeping down the spirit of
insurrection among the slaves. Education civilized Douglass and he
became aware of various truths about slavery.

Booker T. Washington was born in a log cabin. His mother worked as a
cook on the plantation owner’s house. She did not get time to look after her
children because her work started early in the morning and ended late at
night. Whenever she got chicken or she almost stole from a master’s house,
fed her children late in the night. Washington defended the theft of his
mother in following words:

One of my earliest recollections is that of my mother cooking
a chicken late at night and awakening her children for the
purpose of feeding them. How or where she got it I do not
know from our owner’s farm. Some people may call this
theft. If such a thing were to happen how, I should condemn it as theft myself. But taking place at the time I did and for the reason that it did no one could ever make be believe that my mother was guilty of thieving. She was simply a victim of the system of slavery.57.

Booker T. Washington started Tuskegee Institute for the people of his race, to educate them and brought them under the force of civilization, liberty and self-respect. Washington was encouraged by Mrs. Ruffner to educate and only with her help he went to Hampton Institute and earned and learned there.

Richard Wright was a racially mixed child like Douglass and Washington. His family was deserted by his father who left all of them for a mistress and he lived with her. In childhood, Wright suffered a lot because of poverty and hunger. Richard Wright completed his graduation with hard work.

Wright traces the growth of his hunger for knowledge by relating incident at every point to his objective experience, revealing the need for it is a response to the barriers of his stunted environment and how it orders his confused emotions and hostilities. Only after he accumulated a wealth of material incidents, showing the origin of the need in the social system he gave it a theoretical formulation. Richard narrates:

Ella” he asks a school teacher boarding with the family. “What are you reading?” Her answer in evasive and he presses her further – But I want to know. It is the story of Bluebeard and his seven wives. The tale made the world around me be throb live. As she spoke reality changed the look of things altered and the world became people with magical presences. My sense of life deepened and the feel of things was different somehow. Enchanted and enthralled, I stopped her constantly to ask for details. My imagination blazed. The sensations the story aroused in me were never to leave me. When she was about to finish when my interest was
keenest, when I was lost to the world around me Granny stepped briskly onto the porch.58.

Grandmother forbade the teacher to tell him anymore stories because it was the Devils work. Richard did not stop reading books. He narrates his hunger for reading in following words:

   Burning to learn to read he steals novels and nags his mother into telling him the meaning of words, they were ‘the gateway to a forbidden and enchanting land’. Later he questions her about white folks and colour differences if put off and insists, I want to know. He asks if his grandmother couldn’t find out who her father was. “for what silly?” so she could know. “know for what?” “just to know. “but for what?” I could not say. I could not get anywhere.59.

The same ceaseless questions arose when he noticed a black chain gang in streets. Richard narrates:

   What are they? What’s a chain gang? What did they do? Why didn’t the white men wear stripes? Why are there so many black men wearing stripes – why don’t all black men fight all the white men out there.60.

In high school the questions were broader but they followed the same pattern and fed in the same direction:

   What was it that made the hate of whites for blacks so steady, seemingly so woven into the texture of things? What kind of life was possible under that hate? How had this hate come to be? Nothing about the problems of Negroes was ever taught in the classrooms at school and whenever I would raise these questions with the boys they would either remain silent or turn the subject into a joke. They were vocal about the petty individual wrongs they suffered but they possessed no desire for knowledge of the picture as a whole. Then why was I worried about it? 61.
Although he did not find answers right away he learnt that reading enlarges and clarifies the context of the questions and writing gives shape to the mood and the restless longing that compels him to keep asking. His first exposure to H. L. Mencken taught him that words could be used as one would use a club. Knowledge defended him against the cultural oppression of helplessness and despair. But he risked violence to pursue it for he had to forge a Whiteman’s name on a permission slip to get books out of the library. Richard, at the age of 10 got in the habit of drinking because of poverty for few cents. Old African Americans asked Richard to speak wrong words to the ladies and gave him cents.

All the six autobiographers are influenced by the culture of the society in which they were born and lived. Dalits are influenced by the Hindus and African Americans by the Americans. We see the impact of high societies on both the communities but the autobiographers are not lost under the burden of cultural impact instead they created space for themselves in the society in which they are harassed.
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